

2014 Wild Bison Hunting Information

Bison Management

Wild bison are designated as “wildlife” by the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission and Wyoming Livestock Board. The Jackson Wild Bison Hunt Area excludes Grand Teton National Park (GTNP), John D. Rockefeller Jr. Memorial Parkway and Yellowstone National Park. The majority of the bison herd is distributed in GTNP during the spring and summer months. Small groups of bull bison utilize Bridger-Teton National Forest (BTNF) lands east of GTNP during the late summer and early fall and cow/calf groups begin seasonal movements to the National Elk Refuge (NER), Shadow Mountain, and Spread Creek areas during this time.

Hunting Access Restrictions for Area 2 (Jackson)

In 2007, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) began working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to identify areas open to bison hunting on the NER. Bison hunting in the Jackson area is limited to a portion of the NER as well as lands of the BTNF, small parcels of state owned land (except those within the jurisdictional boundary of GTNP) and potentially some private lands with landowner permission. One complication of this bison hunt is the animals often roam between lands that are open to hunting and lands of GTNP and the John D. Rockefeller Jr. Memorial Parkway, where bison hunting is not allowed. Because bison are often drifting from open hunting areas to closed areas, it is imperative that you become very familiar with the boundaries to ensure you are hunting land open to bison hunting.

A limited number of bison hunters will be issued permits to access a portion of the NER for each hunt period. To apply for a bison hunting permit to hunt on the National Elk Refuge, hunters must complete an application online between July 14 – July 31, initially applying for only one hunt period. The results of the computerized random draw will be posted on the application web site by 11:00 a.m. on August 4. Permits will be issued through the Wyoming Game & Fish Department Hunter Management Area program at <http://wgfd.wyo.gov/plpwhmprogram/frmHunterManagementDetail.aspx>. All information about alternate permits and hunt periods is available through this website as well.

Wild bison hunting on the National Forest will remain open throughout the season to persons holding a wild bison license. Seasonal closures may limit access to some portions of the BTNF. Hunters should refer to Buffalo and Jackson Ranger Districts map for the BTNF, which can be purchased from the Jackson Interagency Visitor Center at 460 North Cache. Vehicle use maps are available online at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/btnf/maps-pubs>.

Stalking and Selecting Your Bison

As with other wild animals, how close you can approach a bison depends on the amount of cover, your stalking ability, and the wariness of the animal. Naturally, the closer you are, the better the chance of making a clean, quick kill. Bison can be dangerous animals and it is important that you recognize signs of agitation in an animal to avoid getting injured. Typical signs of agitation include a raised tail, snorting and scraping of the ground with the front hooves.



If your license is valid for a specific sex of animal (i.e. Type 4 female/calf wild bison) it is important that you be able to differentiate between bulls and cows. **A one to two year-old bull and a mature cow are difficult to distinguish.** Additional information and an interactive bison ID exam are available on the WGFD website at <http://gf.state.wy.us/bisonid/default.aspx>

If you have a cow license, pay particular attention to the animal's head. Generally, bulls are a considerably larger animal, with more massive horns. Yearling bulls have horns that with a larger diameter base and grow outward more than female bison. Cows have similar shaped horns but are typically much thinner and curve inward at the tips. A penile sheath is typically evident on older bulls, but not on younger bulls. A profile view is not the best view for sex identification. **Please refer to the sheet of photographs comparing the different sexes and age classes included in this packet.**

Adult cow (right) and young bull bison (behind and left).
Note the lighter and curved horn on the cow.



Remember to identify the sex and age class of the animal you are stalking. Young bulls can be identified by the heavy based horns. Cows have thinner horns that curve inward as they grow older. There are two young bulls in the photo above identified by arrows.

It is possible you may encounter a large herd of bison. If so, it is advised you select an animal away from the herd to avoid losing it among the others if it is wounded and able to run off. The bottom line is to take your time and study the animals before pulling the trigger.

Shooting your bison

Unlike other big game hunting in Wyoming, a minimum of a .270 caliber rifle is required to hunt bison. Refer to the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission Chapter 15 Wild Bison Recreational Hunting regulation legal weapon information. When shooting a bison there are two recommended shot placements for achieving a clean kill, refer to the following diagrams for more information. The first recommended lethal shot is the traditional shot in the heart/lung area. This shot is used by most hunters

and can be placed by locating the area slightly above the animal's knee. The advantage to this shot is the lethal area is larger and easier to hit. The disadvantage is a bison can often take several shots in this area before going down, particularly bulls. The second recommended shot is in the neck vertebrae. This shot should be made approximately six inches straight back from the bottom/base of the horn however, this is a difficult shot to make. In either case, it is recommended you take your time, use a solid rest to steady your gun and take a shot you are comfortable with.



A view of the skeleton and vital organ location in a wild bison.



Bison shot placement for clean kill. Note the traditional heart/lung area provides the largest target.

Remember to closely watch the animal you shoot to avoid losing it if it is wounded and able to run off. Blood on a wounded bison is hard to see in the thick, dark brown hair. Once the animal is down, it is not uncommon for other bison in the area to crowd around the downed animal. It may take some time for the other animals to disperse from the area. If another bison license holder is in the vicinity, they may be able to help disperse the animals.

Approach a downed bison with extreme caution. Only approach the animal closely when you are confident it is dead and then do so from the back of the animal. If it appears the animal is dead touch the animal's eye with the tip of your gun barrel to make sure. If there is no response from the animal go ahead and tag the animal at that time.

Recovering Your Bison From the Field

The American bison is the largest land mammal in North America. Most hunters do not fully appreciate the size and undertaking of field dressing such an animal until they've actually done it. Do not underestimate the amount of work involved in recovering your bison from the field. The meat of the bison is nothing short of a delicacy and it is absolutely imperative that the meat be cooled as quickly as possible to avoid spoilage. As with other big game animals, such as elk or moose, the neck meat is particularly susceptible to spoilage and the massive neck on a bison makes it far more difficult to cool.

To help make the field dressing process as efficient as possible we recommend you bring at least three strong helpers and an efficient means for getting the meat out of the field (for example pack horses, a game cart, sleds, etc.) and to your vehicle. To further transport the animal, a flatbed trailer is useful or a pickup truck at a minimum. (Refer to BTNF Motor Vehicle Use Map for all motorized vehicle restrictions on Forest Service lands).

Recommended equipment would include:

- Three or more sharp knives and a sharpening stone or steel, a meat saw and an axe
- Game meat bags or bed sheets
- A plastic tarp to lay meat on while butchering
- Rubber gloves
- If horses or ATV (ATV's are not permitted on the NER or GTNP retrieval roads) are not available, a game cart, a backpack frame or a durable plastic sled may be useful
- Ropes for securing meat
- Salt for preserving the cape or hide

There is limited access for retrieval of bison across lands administered by GTNP, refer to the GTNP retrieval map. On the NER, successful bison hunters may access NER retrieval roads by vehicle once their animal is down. All NER regulations and restrictions are included with your NER permit when you successfully apply for and receive your NER permit through the online application process.

Should a wounded bison move onto GTNP or closed NER or BTNF lands, do not pursue the animal. Contact the GTNP Interagency dispatch at **307-739-3301** and authorized personnel will direct you in the recovery of the animal.



Mandatory Reporting



Wyoming Game and Fish Commission regulation requires that you report the sex, age class (calf or adult) and location of your harvest within three days (72 hours) of taking a wild bison to the Jackson Regional office. If you are unsuccessful, you must still submit a completed Bison Hunter Information Card to the Jackson Regional Office within three days (72 hours) of the end of the season. Failure to submit the Hunter Information Card will result in a citation. The mailing address for the Jackson Office is PO Box 67, Jackson, WY 83001. For 2014, we will be collecting the front two incisors for aging. The enclosed tooth envelope shows a diagram of the two teeth we need to determine age. Complete all the information requested on the envelope, this will ensure that you get the results of our lab's age analysis a few months after your harvest. When you drop off the tooth envelope and Bison Hunter Information Card at the Regional Office, (either during office hours at the front desk, or after hours in the cooler by the east door) you have fulfilled the requirement for reporting your harvest.